

Tells Why Coos River Public Schools Should Be Consolidated

Editor Times:

A few days more and the people of Coos River will decide a question that will have an important bearing on the future educational conditions of their community. On June 19 the school voters will say whether their children shall continue to attend the inefficient one-teacher school, or shall be given a school equal to that of any town in the state.

The writer asks the people of Coos River to view this proposition thru a clear, colorless glass.

Three principal questions arise, and these the writer will endeavor to answer:

(1) Would the new plan have a marked educational advantage over the present system?

(2) Would the pupils be transported to and from school with all reasonable safety?

(3) Would the initial cost and that of maintenance be burdensome to the taxpayer?

In answering these questions, very little personal opinion is given. Excerpts are cited from reliable sources.

In the "Government of the American People" by Strong and Schaffer, we find the following: "About the year 1839 a great educational movement began. The common school had become very defective, lifeless, and unprofitable. When the schools were examined, one of the weak spots in the system was found to be the independent district. . . The independent schools are apart by themselves, and have little connection with the educational world. They therefore get into ruts and lose all spirit and enterprise. . . Little by little the change was made in a few states, and the movement now is well under way. In several states there has recently been a strong movement for the consolidation of small districts into larger ones. This plan has been tried in some places with excellent results. The schools are very much better under the new system, because, (a) better teachers are usually attainable; (b), there is better chance for effective supervision, and (c), there is the stimulus of numbers and of the rivalry of several departments working side by side."

Our present schools are made up usually of seven or eight grades, requiring thirty-five to forty classes daily. Think for a moment of having the school day of five and a half hours divided up into thirty-five or forty parts! How much time can be allotted to each recitation and assignment? To say nothing of the dozens of other little incidents that take up the time in school. White, in his "Art of Teaching" says that he once attended a school of twelve pupils who formed over thirty "so-called classes," he alone forming four and, for a part of the time, five of those classes. In the writer's present school, of the thirty-five to thirty-eight classes daily, twenty to twenty-four are "made up" of one pupil each. The drawback comes, not only from the very small fractions into which the day must of necessity be divided in order to give each one a "hearing," but the lone pupil is at a decided disadvantage. "Class teaching has important advantages. Each pupil is benefited by the participation of other pupils. His view is corrected or widened by theirs, and from their point of view he gains new insight and fuller knowledge. Their grasp of what is taught quickens his mental activity, and their success stimulates him to greater effort. Moreover, the cooperation of pupils in class work is an excellent preparation for real life. It begets the feeling of social cooperation, awakening a desire to do what others are doing, and the ambition to do well whatever is attempted." White's Art of Teaching. He also quotes the following from the Proceedings of National Educational Association, 1895: "The class system is really one of the greatest inventions made in pedagogy. A class recitation is a great means of instruction; far more potent than any device of individual instruction."—Dr. W. T. Harris. Also, "The wise teacher finds large advantage in group teaching. The many sided friction is a good thing for the child. Class exercise is a tremendous impulse in forwarding individual children. Individualism tends to a loss of advantage of the spirit of cooperative effort. Class work re-inforces each by the understanding of all others."—Dr. R. G. Boone.

In Bulletin number 232 of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, we read, "The teacher's work relative to individual pupils is most effective and

direct during the recitation period. This period should occupy the largest possible part in the pupil's school day.

In certain Ohio schools the district pupil recited during 16 per cent of his time and spent 84 per cent in study or idleness; the consolidated-school pupil's time was almost evenly divided 49 1/2 per cent recitation and 50 1/2 per cent study. The last-named pupils had more instruction, drill, and opportunity to do work with thoroughness. The course of study of the district schools was admittedly crowded to the limit, the real reason, as shown, being not too great a variety of studies, but lack of time for instruction. The large number of daily classes is a problem which every district-school teacher is struggling to overcome, but it is inseparably a part of the system and cannot be altered except by consolidation."

In the same U. S. Bulletin No. 232, we read, "The investigation herein recorded shows that the importance of this system is a country-life institution can scarcely be overestimated, and from this broad point of view it has commanded the interest of the United States Department of Agriculture.

"From a realization that the old district-school system no longer conformed to the modern educational and economic conditions the plan was evolved some years ago of transporting at public expense pupils of neighboring school districts to large central schools. The plan has proved exceedingly popular, and a large portion of the one and two-room district schools in the entire country seems destined to be supplanted by an educational system under which groups of these primitive institutions of learning will be merged into commodious consolidated schools, equipped with modern conveniences, and provided with means for the transportation of children from and to their homes. During the past five years more consolidated school buildings have been constructed in the United States than during the twenty-five years preceding. Consolidation of rural schools has won a permanent place among the distinctly American institutions.

"Consolidation, with its attendant function of public conveyance of pupils, is now a part of the rural school system of thirty-two states. Eighteen hundred completely, and not less than two thousand partially consolidated schools attest the remarkable adaptability of the system to the peculiar needs of the agricultural communities.

"It is significant that, in the course of this investigation, not one case of the abandonment of a completely consolidated school was found.

"The fact that under consolidation twice as many children in the country complete the eight grades as under the district-school plan is of immense educational and economic importance to state and nation.

"The idea of an education specifically designed for the country boy and girl who is to remain on the farm has begun to take form; a new American institution is in process of creation which will provide for them primary and secondary education in a consolidated school, owned and conducted by the community in which the farm home is situated, so that the pupil may remain under parental care and guidance until at least a part of the high school course is completed.

"Simple justice, if there were no other reason, should compel the admission that to attend high school is as much the right of the country child as of the city child. The only place where this right is freely accorded is in the typical consolidated school district.

"The educational solicitude which is extended to each individual child is the true index of the value which a community places upon its children.

"The per cent of the school population attending high school in the unconsolidated townships in Ohio was only 2.2, as compared with 12.4 per cent in the consolidated townships. Illustrating how much more effective the consolidated school is in leading the rural youth to high school.

"Historical fact and statistical evidence lead to the conclusion that consolidation is a natural and logical step in the evolution of the American rural school system. It was not inaugurated in imitation of the city school system, but the idea of consolidation and its necessary complement, transportation of pupils, was conceived because the resourceful

American farmer found that it would serve the peculiar needs of his own rural community. Consolidation was created by necessity to meet new conditions in the open country.

"In the consolidated rural school all children from the entire district meet, mingle, compete, strive, make friendships, and learn how to work together. The school is free and accessible to all children within its jurisdiction. All the boys and girls, including those attending high school, return home daily, and, doing their allotted work or chores mornings and evenings, keep in touch with the home, the farm, and all its affairs, and remain within the shelter of home during the most impressionable period of their lives.

"The consolidated school is an institution which not only affords instruction in the various common branches of knowledge, but also reaches out and touches the communal life and the home life and enriches and enlarges the individual life of the youth as the district school never did and never can do, even under the most favorable conditions."

So much for the educational advantages. Now for the transportation of the pupils to and from school.

In a letter, State Superintendent Alderman says, "I am very much in favor of consolidation of schools. You may say that they are consolidating in a number of places in Oregon. Pleasant Hill in Lane county, five districts are united; Olsea, Benton county, three districts are united, two wagons haul the children, and is working very satisfactorily indeed. Newburg has a consolidated school, two wagons haul the children. They also have a consolidated district in Scappoose, Columbia county. I notice that where districts have once been united, they do not go back to the small districts.

"The rural life commission appointed by Mr. Roosevelt reported that the greatest need of the time was greater schools for the county which could only be had by consolidation."

While districts all over the country are using wagons for transporting children, Coos River's peculiar situation would necessitate transporting them by boat. In this there is at least one advantage. It is commonly known that no other means of transportation is so economical as by means of water. Captain Edwards, of the North Fork line of boats, stated to the writer that no charge would be made for carrying pupils on their regular boats, if a teacher accompanies them. On the South Fork line, Captain Rogers informs the writer that the charge would be very reasonable.

On the lower river, probably a special boat would have to be provided.

There can be absolutely no activity of any sort without some risk of accident. However, the fact that for years the pupils have been carried to and from the schools on Coos River without accident (so far as the writer is aware) seems to warrant the assertion that the risk of danger from this source is very slight. It can be made a part of the teacher's contract that he or she shall reside or board on one of the routes, and accompany the pupils on the boats, to reduce the liability of accident to the minimum. At the present time, nearly all the pupils in the Myrtle Bank school go there on the regular boat. Half of those at the Myrtle Grove school reach there on the regular boats from both up and down the river. If this question is looked at without prejudice, it seems that there can be very slight grounds for protest.

As to the initial cost of the proposed school, the matter will rest entirely with the people of the community. It will be for them to say how expensive a building and how efficient a school they may require.

However, it is presumed that a four-room building and a two-year high school course is about what will be wanted. The writer has it from a reliable contractor of broad experience that a very creditable and substantially built modern wooden building of four rooms and large basement, concrete foundation, and equipped with up-to-date heating apparatus can be constructed for \$6,000. Placing the necessary equipment and the cost of grounds at \$2,000, we have an initial cost of \$8,000, but for a high estimate, let us place it at ten thousand. The usual rate of interest at the present time on school bonds is about five per cent. This would make the interest \$500 per year. Placing another five hundred a year in the sinking fund, this part of the expense would be \$1,000. In the opinion of the writer, for the first year or two, only three teachers would be necessary; but let us make the estimate

on four, and place the salary at \$300 per month. If nine months of school be desired the teachers salaries would be \$2,700 per annum. Here again the estimate is high, for probably less than nine months would be desired. It is difficult to say just what a boat on the lower river might cost; but it seems reasonable to believe that some man with a suitable boat can be secured to make that run, to attend to the janitor work and supply the fuel for about \$100 per month, or nine hundred per year. Allowing \$400 for other items and incidental expenses, we have a total expense, including interest and sinking fund, of five thousand dollars a year. It is the earnest belief of the writer that this can be considerably cut. The figures are not all at hand for the present apportionment from state and county funds, but it is known to be in the neighborhood of \$2,000. Placing it at \$1,600, this would leave an annual amount of \$3,400 to be raised by taxation. The 1910 assessed valuation of the proposed new district was \$930,919. It will be seen that a levy of four mills on this would produce \$3,723.67, covering the full estimate and leaving a balance of over \$300.

That a four mill tax for the purpose of erecting and maintaining a good modern school is very reasonable can scarcely be denied, especially when compared with the following levies made for the present year:

Table with 2 columns: Location and Millage rate. Myrtle Point 5 mills, Coquille 8 mills, Marshfield 11 mills, North Bend 15 mills, Number 81 25 mills

The very low rate of tax that would be necessary on Coos River is accounted for by the fact that the assessed valuation of the proposed district exceeded by only two districts in the county—North Bend and Marshfield. It is practically three times that of Bunker Hill, more than double that of Empire or Myrtle Point, practically a third more than that of either Bandon or Coquille (and each of the last three has a four-year high school). Its valuation is three-fourths as much as that of North Bend and practically half as much as that of Marshfield.

U. S. Bulletin No. 232 says, "A district with taxable property of \$500,000 and upwards, can safely undertake consolidation without fear of finding it burdensome." This amount is almost doubled by the Coos River district.

From the same source, "The consolidated townships in Trumbull and Ashtabula counties, Ohio, which were made the subject of special study, had in 1906 a taxable valuation, per child of school age, of \$2,247. Many communities, however, undertake consolidation of their schools on a much smaller financial basis. One township in Clay county, Iowa, has a successful consolidated graded school, and the taxable wealth supporting it is about \$1,414 per child, nine townships with consolidated schools in Roulette county, N. Dak., have an average of \$956 of taxable property per child, and two large districts in Orange county, Fla., \$916 and \$740, respectively, per child." Unfortunately, the writer has not at hand the exact school population of the proposed Coos River district, he believes that it does not exceed one hundred children of school age. On this basis, the average property valuation per child is more than \$9,300. This is a fact that should not be overlooked.

Again we quote from U. S. Bulletin No. 232: "Those opposed to consolidation yet increased cost as an objection, urge knowledge of the true financial and educational status of their own district school would often show an expenditure of more money per child per day in school attendance than is expended in many consolidated schools. In many of these small schools the cost of schooling per pupil equals that in consolidated schools which have high-school courses. The communities have learned to tax themselves for school purposes and do it cheerfully, and now that they see results, would not under any circumstances return to the former system of many small districts.

"In communities where consolidation has had a fair trial, fully 95 per cent of the school patrons give it their indorsement and hearty support."

Further facts are given in the bulletin to show that the attendance in the consolidated districts is at least 25 per cent higher than under similar conditions in single districts. Also that the eight grades of common school work are finished, on the average, in 8.4 months less time in the consolidated schools than under the old system. These two items certainly are worthy of consideration.

Much more remains to be said, but lack of space forbids. In conclusion, first, it must be ad-

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mitted that under consolidation, the efficiency of the school would be very noticeably increased.

Second, it seems that the proposed means of transportation would be as safe and efficient as could reasonably be desired.

Third, the cost to the average individual taxpayer would be far be-

low the cost of sending a single away from home to attend school. Yours for rural school progress. E. R. PETERSON

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